

# CONSUMER GUIDE TO MAKING INFORMED HEALTHCARE CHOICES

When you have a life-threatening emergency, you should always go to the nearest hospital. However, if you are planning to have surgery or you have a chronic condition that will require inpatient, outpatient, post-acute and/or continuing care, you will want to make an informed choice.

Patients should familiarize themselves with healthcare services in their area and the availability of certain emergency services, such as trauma centers, stroke, cardiac surgery, burn units, pediatric emergency departments, geriatric emergency departments, etc.

## HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATION COMPARISON QUICK LIST

When comparing healthcare organizations, look for an organization that:

- has experience with your condition, as measured by volume for certain procedures or conditions;
- engages in data-driven quality improvement;
- values patient- and family-engaged care;
- possesses special designations and certifications related to workforce and/or your specific condition;
- meets your personal needs in terms of location, patient-centered practices, etc.; and
- participates in your health insurance plan.

*Much of this information can be found on your local hospital's website.*

We encourage you to take these steps when making your choice:

## Step 1:

Learn about the care you need and your hospital choices.

- **Talk to your doctors or healthcare providers:**
  - > Find out which organizations they work with.
  - > Ask which organizations they think give the best care for your condition or procedure.
  - > Ask if these organizations participate in your insurance network.
- **Review available data about your condition or procedure and potential surgeons or other types of specialists. If no data are available, ask your doctors or healthcare providers:**
  - > Should you consider a specialty hospital, teaching hospital, community hospital or one that does research or clinical trials related to your condition? Typically, patients with less complex care are served well by their local community hospital.
  - > Will you need a surgeon or other type of specialist?
  - > Who will be responsible for your overall care while you're in the hospital?
- **If you are interviewing new providers, ask questions such as:**
  - > How many patients have you cared for who had my same condition or procedure?
  - > What is your approach to quality improvement?
  - > How do you use data and evidence-based best practices to improve care?
  - > How do you engage patients and families?
- **If you will need post-acute or continuing care after leaving the hospital, ask:**
  - > Will the hospital help arrange for that care?
  - > Are there options for in-home care rather than facility-based care?

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## Step 2:

### Think about your personal needs.

- Do you want a hospital located near family members or friends who can serve as care partners during your stay and after discharge?
- Does the hospital have patient-centered care practices in place (care partners, patient-directed visitation, etc.)?
- Does the hospital belong to a larger healthcare system that can help coordinate your care after discharge?

## Step 3:

### Think about your financial needs.

- **Check your insurance coverage and determine with your insurance company and/or hospital billing office what you will be responsible to pay out of pocket. Ask:**
  - > Do you need pre-authorization or a referral before you're admitted to the hospital?
  - > Do you have to use in-network hospitals, surgeons or specialists?
  - > Do you have to pay more to use a hospital, surgeon or specialist that doesn't participate in your plan?
  - > Is there a contracted rate for non-covered services?
  - > Do you need to meet certain requirements to get care after you leave the hospital?
  - > Are there restrictions related to how much post-acute or continuing care you can receive?
  - > Are there restrictions related to where you receive post-acute or continuing care (home vs. facility)?

## Step 4:

### Review healthcare quality data provided by trusted sources.

- **Given the inability to validate social media ratings, we strongly suggest not basing your final care decisions on anonymous online reviews. Generally, while they are not perfect, state and federal government reports are considered to be the most credible.**
  - > Medicare Hospital Compare
  - > Medicare Nursing Home Compare
  - > Medicare Home Health Compare
  - > Medicare Hospice Compare
  - > Medicare Physician Compare
  - > Medicare Inpatient Rehabilitation Facility Compare
  - > New York State Department of Health Hospital Profile
  - > New York State Department of Health Nursing Home Profile
  - > New York State Department of Health Home Care Profile
  - > New York State Department of Health Hospice Profile
  - > New York State Physician Profile
- **Review special accreditations, designations or certifications:**
  - > The Joint Commission
  - > Det Norske Veritas
  - > Planetree International
  - > American Nurses Credentialing Center Magnet Recognition
  - > Solid Organ Transplant
  - > American College of Surgeons Cancer Programs

**After doing your research, supplement your findings with conversations with your doctor and/or healthcare provider; local hospital staff; and trusted family, friends and neighbors.**

Adapted from the *Medicare Guide to Choosing a Hospital*, [medicare.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/10181-guide-choosing-hospital.pdf](https://www.medicare.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/10181-guide-choosing-hospital.pdf)